

I did not grow up with my brother, he lived somewhere else. But, he did know who I was, knew I was a talented speaker. I wasn't an elder of Israel, but I was well respected among the people. My name is Aaron.

I am the first-born son of our family; a first-born son of the tribe of Levi. I am three years older than my younger brother, Moses, the greatest prophet of all time. Our older sister, Miriam, was also a prophet.¹ I was eighty-three years-old when the exodus from Egypt began.

I joined Moses when he was on the way to confront Pharaoh. I helped him communicate with both the Israelite elders and Pharaoh. God gave me great powers to make sure Pharaoh let the Hebrews leave Egypt. I was Moses' closest confidante and his right-hand man. I always covered his backside whenever he was attacked. Well, unless I was the attacker.

I was by Moses' side as we talked to Pharaoh and sent the ten plagues. I was by his side as we crossed the Red Sea, and watched Pharaoh and his men drown, the leadership and army of entire country, completely destroyed.

Imagine the party we had once the Lord let us pass through the Red Sea, and after he destroyed our Egyptian enemies! The singing and dancing! Young and old! No longer slaves! Free at last. Free. What can possibly go wrong?

My father used to say, "The key to happiness is having low expectations, and nobody has lower expectations than me!" My father was one of the happiest men I ever knew. And he was a slave. Was he joking? I never really knew but he taught me to be aware of people's differing expectations.

Within days of leaving the Red Sea, there was a huge difference in expectations. I knew the Hebrew people expected to be free, to be without hunger or thirst, and to have a life of comfort. I wasn't sure what God wanted, but it certainly wasn't limited to what the Hebrews wanted.

Our party ended as Moses led us straight into the Desert of Shur. We went three days without finding water. Finally found some and it was undrinkable, so awful, so bitter, we couldn't drink it. In the chaos of kids crying and animals bleating, the people complained to Moses, "What are

¹ Exodus 15:20

we to drink?" It was a legitimate question. My brother was just as frustrated as the people, and he cried out to the Lord.

Well, God had their attention. He told them that if they would be obedient to his commands and do what is right, he would keep them healthy. He showed Moses a piece of wood that Moses threw in the water. Immediately, the water was sweet. Drinkable. Delicious.

Shortly thereafter, God took us to Elim, a place with twelve springs of water and seventy palm trees. Elim seemed like a pretty good place to stay, but God had other ideas. So, about six weeks after the Red Sea, we headed into the Desert of Sin. Differing expectations reared their ugly heads again. The further we got into the desert, the hungrier and thirstier the people became. And the worse their memories became. They complained that Moses could have just left them in Egypt where they had all the food they wanted.

Rather than correct their faulty memories, God provided something for them to eat. Manna. Maybe you've heard of it. Every day, except the Sabbath, manna appeared on the ground and the people collected enough to eat. On the day before the Sabbath, they collect double the manna needed for the day so they would have enough for the Sabbath and would not have to work on the Sabbath. The Israelites ate this manna until they entered the Promised Land.

From the Desert of Sin, we traveled from place to place as the Lord commanded. We eventually reached Rephidim, but, once again, there was no water for the people, nor for herds of animals to drink. The people demanded that Moses give them water. He asked them why they demanded this of him. He understood their problem more deeply. "Why are you testing the Lord?" he asked.

The people went nuts, completely out of control. Moses approached the Lord, and asked what to do. The Lord told Moses to take his staff with which he struck the Nile during the plagues, and take some of the elders of Israel, and stand in front of the people. The Lord said that he would stand by the rock at Horeb, and when Moses struck the rock, water would come out of it for the people to drink. The people got their water, but they had demonstrated that they had no trust in the Lord.

God clearly wanted the Israelites to follow wherever he led them. God also wanted to protect the Israelites while they traveled to the Promised Land. The foreign people they came into contact with were supposed to leave them alone, and most of them did.

The Amalekites, were a wild, vicious people having every intention of taking advantage of a peaceful people who seemed to be defenseless. They decided not to let the Hebrews travel uncontested. Moses appointed Joshua to choose some men and fight them off.

Moses was going to take part in the defense plan as well, but chose to fight in his own way. He took his staff of God, our friend Hur, and me to a hill overlooking the battlefield. As long as Moses held up the staff, the Israelites would dominate, but when he lowered the staff, the

Amalekites surged ahead. When those trends became apparent, Hur and I moved a rock over for Moses to sit on, and then we held his hands up. Until sunset. The Israelites, led by Joshua, won the war!

The Lord was so angry with the Amalekites for attacking us, that he said he would blot out their name from under heaven. Moses built an altar to confirm the victory and give God the glory, and declared that the Lord would be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.

Until the time of David, the Amalekites harassed the people of Israel. For more than four centuries. Then one day, they attacked David's defenseless camp and kidnapped all the people. David chased them down, wiped them out, and they are not mentioned again in the Bible.

One afternoon, we received word that Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses who lived in Midian was coming into the Israelite camp we'd set up in the wilderness. He was bringing Moses' two sons with him, Moses rushed out to meet them. Moses told Jethro all that God had done for the Hebrews. Jethro was a priest of Midian, and responded by acknowledging that the Lord is greater than all other gods, and he brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to the Lord.

All the elders of Israel and I came to eat with Jethro. We were quite impressed with his burnt offering and sacrifice to God. We wondered if that was something we should do, but none of us were priests, and we weren't sure if that would please God or not. So...we did nothing.

The next day, my brother sat to act as judge for the people. There were hordes of people standing around wanting his attention. Moses sat in that same spot listening to the people and sorting out their issues from morning until night. Jethro watched this from a distance.

This wasn't a time of huge problems, but it was a good time to prevent future ones. Jethro gave some advice that should resound with religious leaders for the rest of time. "What you are doing is not good, for you or the people," Jethro said, "You are wearing yourself out. You cannot do this alone." He then instructed Moses on how to delegate his authority to chiefs of thousands of people, groups of hundreds of people, fifties and tens. The chiefs judged the easy cases, and Moses sat in judgment on the hard cases.

We'd been gone from Egypt about three months, and it was clear that we should be settling in for the long haul, not expecting things to be over soon. God was providing manna, we had a new judicial system, and we were in the middle of nowhere. Jethro's advice should have changed the expectations of all of us. There was no way that this was going to end in the next few days, for sure.

But our lives were about to change. In fact, the course of history for the entire world was about to change.

We were moving from the desert to the mountains, but not for a scenic vacation.